

Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Air Force Achievement Medal. He also holds the Joint Meritorious Service Award with one oak leaf cluster, and the Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with Combat "V" device and four oak leaf clusters. His service awards include the Air Force Good Conduct Medal, the Air Reserve Forces Meritorious Service Medal with ten oak leaf clusters, the National Defense Service Medal with two bronze service stars, the Southwest Asia Service Medal with three bronze campaign stars, the Air Force Longevity Service Award with eight oak leaf clusters, the Armed Forces Reserve Medal with the gold hourglass device and three Mobilization "M" devices, the Small Arms Expert Marksmanship Ribbon and the Air Force Training Ribbon. His Foreign Service awards include the Kuwait Liberation Medal from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Kuwait Liberation Medal from the Government of Kuwait. Chief Benson's New York State military awards include the New York State Long and Faithful Service Award with five shield devices, the New York State Desert Storm Service Medal, the New York State Defense of Liberty Medal and the New York State Exercise Support Ribbon with two "E" devices.

Without question Mr. Speaker, Chief Benson is a very special person. He willingly served his nation, exuding loyalty and pride. For his unrelenting service, Chief Benson can retire knowing he has earned such a status. I would like to wish him well in his retirement years, as he will now be able to spend more free time with his Stephanie, daughter Natalie and two sons, David and Jason. Thank you Chief for all your years of hard work and dedication.

TRIBUTE TO MR. ROBERT  
COULTER "DINK" ELDRIDGE

**HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, Jr.**

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer a tribute to one of Knoxville, Tennessee's finest citizens. Many in this body and around the Country will not recognize his name, but when Mr. Robert Coulter "Dink" Eldridge, Sr. passed away at the age of 85 on February 21, 2003 this Nation lost a great American. Many Knoxvilleans join me in mourning his death.

Dink Eldridge graduated from the University of Tennessee in 1940. During his final years at the University, he managed the Volunteer Football team as they went undefeated in regular season play and participated in the Orange Bowl, the Rose Bowl and the Sugar Bowl. More than victory marked his time with the Volunteers however. Those who knew him at this time also remember his dedicated leadership and desire to see every athlete reach his fullest potential.

In addition to his time managing the Volunteers, Dink managed the East Army All Star football team at Yale University with the great General R.R. Neyland.

In 1942 Dink Eldridge was called to serve his Nation in the United States Army where he served with distinction as a second lieutenant in the Tank Corps. Here again, Dink proved his willingness to serve his fellow man and was awarded both a Purple Heart and Bronze

Star medal for his efforts. After a brief period away from the military, Dink was called on again, this time in the Korean War.

During his professional career, Dink demonstrated a deeply held commitment to excellence. Following his early days as a lineman for Bell Systems, Dink steadily rose in his career. While his supervisory work for Bell took him to cities across the State, Dink was eventually able to return to Knoxville where he served as District Engineer until his retirement in 1971.

Like many leaders, Dink was unable to remain retired for long. In 1986, he was named president of the Concord Telephone Exchange. Dink provided steady leadership to this organization during a period of tremendous growth and remained president until his second retirement in 1993.

With this said, Dink is possibly best known to the people of East Tennessee for his dedicated work in the community. His generosity of time touched countless lives. Through his work on the executive board of the Great Smoky Mountain Council of the Boy Scouts of America and as President of the Bearden Little League Baseball league alone, Dink passed his love of Country and community onto a generation of young people.

In everything Dink did, he strove for excellence in himself and sought to inspire the same in those around him. I am proud to have known Dink for many years, but I am even more proud to have called Dink Eldridge a personal friend.

To his wife Anna Yvonne I say thank-you for being such a supportive and loving part of his life and to his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, I simply say continue carrying the banner of service your father and grandfather held so high.

HONORING HUNTINGTON  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

**HON. STEVE ISRAEL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. ISRAEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the 100th anniversary of the Huntington Historical Society.

The Huntington Historical Society was founded by the local community as an outgrowth of the collection of artifacts gathered together in 1903 for exhibition at the celebration of the Town of Huntington's 250th anniversary. The exhibition was so well received by the community that the exhibition committee decided to keep its collection together and found a Society whose mission would be to preserve the heritage of the Town of Huntington, by maintaining museums, collections and a research center, by educating the public about Long Island's regional history, and by promoting the preservation of historic buildings and sites.

The society serves the dual role of being a repository for the treasures of Huntington's founding families while also reaching out to the community to provide a sense of place and identity in a rapidly changing area proud of its deep historic roots. In addition, the Huntington Historical Society is distinguished as one of the oldest repositories of local history in the New York metropolitan area.

I commend the Huntington Historical Society for their dedication to the historical preservation of the great town of Huntington, and congratulate them on their 100th anniversary.

PRESIDENT SHEVARDNADZE'S  
STATEMENT WELCOMED, BUT  
ACTION ALSO NEEDED

**HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, April 3, 2003*

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, today I want to acknowledge and welcome the March 14th statement of the President of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, pledging his commitment to religious freedom for all Georgians and promising the punishment of individuals complicit in mob attacks on religious minorities. (I am submitting the statement for the RECORD below.) President Shevardnadze made this pledge during an ecumenical service in Tbilisi's Evangelist-Baptist Cathedral Church, attended by leaders of the Georgian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Baptist churches and many individuals from the diplomatic community. The U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, Richard Miles, also attended and addressed the gathering. Reportedly, so many people came that hundreds had to listen via loudspeakers in the churchyard.

The service was initially planned for late January, but defrocked priest Basil Mkalavishvili and his crowd of thugs assaulted worshipers and clergy an hour before it was scheduled to begin—as they have been doing with impunity since 1999. Individuals were beaten as they tried to leave, with rocks and stones being reportedly thrown. While President Shevardnadze quickly condemned that attack, ordering the Interior Minister, the Prosecutor General, State Chancellery Head, and the Security Council Secretary to investigate and punish the perpetrators, no arrests or prosecutions followed.

Despite Georgia's appalling record on religious tolerance for the last few years, I hope President Shevardnadze's speech at the Baptist church signals a new determination to arrest and aggressively prosecute the mob leaders and their henchmen. He promised that "as the President of Georgia and a believer, I shall not restrict myself only to a mere expression of resentment. I do promise that the President and the Authorities of Georgia will do their utmost to grant every person freedom of expression of faith." Driving home the point further, Mr. Shevardnadze declared, "the state will exert its pressure on whoever comes in defiance of this principle. You may stand assured that the aggressors will be brought to justice."

As Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission, over the past three years I have watched with increasing alarm the escalation of mob violence. On September 24th I chaired a Commission hearing focused on this disturbing pattern. The Jehovah's Witnesses have borne the brunt of attacks, along with Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists and Catholics. Most disheartening has been the government's indifference; victims throughout the country have filed approximately 800 criminal complaints, without one criminal conviction.

Despite a series of statements by President Shevardnadze, Georgia's Minister of Interior